M. DESHUMBERT'S ETHICS OF NATURE.

AN association has been formed both in Paris and in London which calls itself The Ethics of Nature Society, and its leading prophet is. M. Deshumbert, of Dunheved Road, Thornton Heath, England. The foundation of their creed is incorporated in a book by M. Deshumbert, entitled *Morale de la Nature,* published by Schleicher Frères, 8 Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, Paris, 1911.

The English edition has been translated from the French by I. M. Hartmann and contains an introduction by Henry James. The latter endorses M. Deshumbert's system, calling his work wholesome and refreshing, and he adds that it is especially so "when compared with the efforts of various recent iconoclasts." M. Deshumbert is not negative but constructive, building upon nature's own ground, and the contents of the book are truly so commonplace that they might be considered almost too simple for any one to controvert its arguments. Mr. James says: "There is no mention of religion in it from beginning to end, but it is eminently honest, it is logical, it has a sound basis in physical science, and its outcome is the inculcation of the highest morality."

Further down he makes the following comment: "The fundamental error of most philosophers, moralists, and founders of religions is that they have not realized man to be a constituent part of the universe, an integral part of nature, a portion of the whole. Man, the writer insists, is completely and unavoidably subject to the same laws as the rest of the universe, and since that is the case he should, just like other beings, follow the way that nature marks out for him. And here M. Deshumbert really enters upon his task. His work is to show the moral laws in the natural world. He deals with the vegetable and the animal world in order to show how nature works in regard to the preservation of life, the propagation of species, and in various other ways....Life is no mere matter of individuals; it is a matter of species and of race, and it is one of continuous, if gradual and slow, progress. What conclusion, then,

ought we to draw from this picture of regular ascent? It is that we should make the most of the life that has been given us, in the sense of husbanding our powers, and using them to the greatest extent. This life, however, must not be lived for ourselves alone, but more and more for our fellows and as a part of the life of the universe. There was a time when men's sympathies did not extend beyond their families, every one outside the family being an enemy. Then the friendship extended to the tribe, to the cities in which men learned to dwell, and afterwards to the nation. Now we are going even beyond this, and our affection is becoming so enlarged as to embrace all humanity. *'Elle (la nature) veut que notre cœur s'élargisse assez pour contenir tout l'univers.'* At the end of the main argument are chapters dealing with 'Certain Duties towards the Body'; 'Certain Duties towards the Intelligence and Esthetic Sentiment'; 'Certain Duties towards Others,' with a concluding chapter 'On Death.'"

The definitions of good and evil as stated by the association are as follows:

"Good is all that contributes to the enlargement of life, to the full physical, intellectual, moral, and esthetic development, to the employment of all our energies, to the harmonious and complete expansion of ourselves and others; evil is all that tends to diminish life, all that hinders this full development, this harmonious expansion."

M. Deshumbert traces morality all through nature. He says:

"If we study nature without any preconceived idea, we shall very soon be convinced that she appears to have three chief purposes.

"These are (1) *to produce life*. We see everywhere a superabundance of life, on the earth, in the air, in the water. In fact we find life where we should the least expect it; for instance, at the very bottom of the sea where absolute darkness prevails.

"(2) *To produce the most intelligent life possible.* We know that as soon as the ocean had sufficiently cooled down, life appeared in the shape of single-cell weed. Then, jelly-like specks were evolved; these specks were more than plants, and not yet animals. But the ascending movement continued with—successively—sea anemones, starfish, annelids, molluscs, arthropoda, ganoid fish, batrachia, dinosaurs, marsupials, birds, placentals, finally man. These many stages have always been on an ascending plane: with each new series of beings the domain of activity and intelligence was enlarged.

Every new series was more capable of higher activities than the preceding one.

"(3) *To produce the most moral life possible.* If we admit that wherever there is care for more than the self, there is morality, then we must admit that plants obey the fundamental laws of ethics in the loving care and great thoughtfulness they display for the welfare of their seeds. Undoubtedly plants show us the earliest example of maternal morality.

"Moreover, just as intelligence increased with each new species of animals, so did morality.

"All animals care for their young, provide them with food, and defend them at the risk of their own lives until the little ones no longer require help. Gregarious animals perform not only fatherly and motherly duties, but brotherly duties as well—duties of mutual help, protection, union. In time of danger the males always expose themselves to defend the females and the young; often sentinels are placed to warn the herd of coming danger, and the mere fact of some members of a flock or of a herd faithfully doing watch for the safety of others, instead of eating or resting, denotes a high degree of morality.

"If, without going into details, we simply throw a glance at the past, we shall see that the laws of nature have been what they are for millions of years, that life dating back from the remotest period, countless species of plants and animals have successively appeared, and that this long evolution has produced thinking and moral beings. Are we not, then, compelled to admit that the march of things tends towards higher thought and morality? For thousands and thousands of centuries billions of billions of beings have lived in order to lead up to this result. Is not the trend of nature clearly shown? Are we not, then, entitled to say that a comprehensive study of the cosmic process, so far as it relates to our earth, does show that morality is grounded in nature, is in harmony with it, is sanctioned by it?

"We can, then, truly say that in all that relates to ethics, nature is our authority.

"Now we may ask, what part should man play in all that is going on round us? What is his duty?

"Man, being part of the universe from which he is derived and into which he will again be absorbed, is bound to follow, as far as his knowledge allows it, the order and laws of the universe."

Among the publications of M. Deshumbert (Paris, Schleicher Frères, 1911) there is one which is quite original. It appeared under the title *Ma Vie,* and bears as author the name "Jesus of Nazareth."

In this the author analyses the psychology of Christ expressed in the first person and makes him address the apostles, the holy women and other adherents of his reform in explaining his birth and his ideals. The discussions with Judas are not the least interesting in this little book.

Besides the writings of M. Deshumbert the Schleicher Frères have also published in book form a course of lectures delivered in the winter of 1910 under the auspices of the French branch of the society. It is entitled *L'Education d'après les Lois de la Nature,* and contains a preface by Dr. Jean Finot, the editor of *La Revue,* who though too skeptical to become a member of the society, sympathizes with its aims, wishes it well, and feels sure that it will meet the needs of a large number of people. The book consists of lectures by Is. Polako (president of the French branch), Dr. P. Regnier, P. A. Dufrenne, Ferdinand Buisson, R. Broda, and G. Sauvebois.

The Ethics of Nature Society also publishes at London an English organ called *The Ethics of Nature Review.* The society intends by means of this *Review,* of books, lectures, leaflets, articles in newspapers, etc., to propagate the theory of ethics as explained in *The Ethics of Nature,* so as to help those who seek for a rational and scientific base as a guide for their conduct. The *Review* (as well as the English edition of M. Deshumbert's book) is published by D. Nutt, 57-59 Long Acre, London, W. C., 1s. net, or 1s. 2½d. by post; and may also be had from the Honorable Secretary, "Dewhurst" Dunheved Road West, Thornton Heath, Surrey.

The issue of this review for April, 1911, discusses one of the burning questions of ethical conduct in a lecture given by Dr. C. W. Saleeby, delivered on March 14th of that year. The subject is "Natural Ethics and Eugenics," and the treatment is both scientific and sensible. We notice that it upholds monogamy as based upon natural conditions and the facts of social interrelations of mankind.

" 'By eugenics I understand the project of making the highest human being possible.' The chief factors in this process, as especially named by Sir Francis Galton are nature and nurture. The eugenics which concerns itself with the natural or hereditary causes, is called by Dr. Saleeby the primary factor. The nurtural, or environmental, takes the place of secondary factor. This is inverting the customary order, where environment is generally represented as answering most, if not the whole of the question. But although neither of the factors could stand without the other, eugenics on biological grounds insist that environment is distinctly secondary....

"As regards the relation of eugenics to the theory and practice

of natural ethics, positive eugenics in the first place is a process evidently approved by nature, being simply the process of natural selection by which those beings who are capable of reproducing their species survive and multiply. Only one point arises here, which has to be met: there are some eugenists (and Mr. Bernard Shaw is amongst the number) who propose that this business of encouraging parenthood on the part of the worthy must be carried out by the abolition of marriage. Marriage—and more especially monogamous marriage—is strictly in keeping with the principles of the Ethics of Nature Society, being conducive, not of most life as concerns a high birth-rate, but certainly of most life as concerns a low death-rate. Also, marriage makes the father responsible psychologically and socially for his children; this aspect of monogamy has to be considered."

There are additional reasons why monogamy is the highest and best and most natural form of marriage. Monogamy originated in northern countries where the struggle for life is hardest, and we may assume that polygamy, if it was practised in northern countries at all in prehistoric times, disappeared under the general stress of the hardships of life. In southern countries polygamy became prevalent, but even there it defiled the higher life and rendered it impossible to reach the high standing of a vigorous enforcement of power which finally was actualized in the north. One of the main reasons that militate against polygamy was the formation of different families belonging to one and the same man. The stories of the Old Testament, of the several families of Abraham, David and others, show that the children of one wife are pitted against the other, and the most infamous outrages between brothers of the same father and a different mother are a matter of history. When Solomon assumed the kingdom through the intrigues of his mother, his first act was the execution of his older brother who had been born to David by a former wife. No wonder that royal families, and in a similar degree aristocrats and families of wealth, soon died out because the members of these families and their heirs waged a bitter war against each other. This alone was sufficient to exterminate polygamy, if it ever existed in countries where the struggle for existence is hardest.

We further quote from the *Ethics of Nature Review* in continuation of its report of Dr. Saleeby's lecture.

"Positive eugenics will endeavor to work through marriage, which is a natural institution far older than any decree or church, and to improve it for the eugenic purpose. The chief method of

positive eugenics to-day is education for parenthood. The education of the young should be from the very start a preparation for parenthood, and should not cease, as it now most commonly does, at that time when it is most needed; namely, at the age of adolescence.

"Negative eugenics certainly has a natural sanction. Natural selection might with equal truth be called natural rejection. Now the question arises, are we to apply the principle of natural rejection to mankind, with the object of preventing the parenthood of the unworthy? It would certainly appear to be a natural proceeding. But here the Ethics of Nature Society says: We are not to kill, on the contrary, we are to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves; whereas nature says these are to be exterminated.

"This apparent opposition between the natural and the moral course of action was dwelt upon at some length by Huxley, in his Romanes Lecture, on 'Evolution and Ethics.' In this lecture he describes cosmic evolution as being a ruthless process where life advances by means of a general slaughter, and where it is merely a case of 'each individual for itself and the devil take the hindmost.' Moral evolution, he said, is the absolute antithesis to the natural; moral evolution is the care of the hindmost, and necessitates at all times a course exactly opposite to the model we have in nature. There are different opinions as to Huxley's reasons for expressing himself in this unjustifiable manner on a subject which he was obviously viewing at the time in a totally false light.....

"There are eugenists who want us to throw moral evolution overboard, as being mere sentimentalism, and to go straight for the destruction of the unfit by means of exposing degenerate babies, as the Spartans did, by means of lethal chambers, and by reverting to all the horrors of our grandfathers' time, the gallows, chains, and death by starvation for the feebleminded. These are the eugenists who take this sacred name of eugenics in vain. Eugenics has nothing to do with killing anybody at any stage of life whatever. Human life, such as it may be, is a sacred thing, and cannot be treated with contempt at any stage whatever of its development. What the eugenist may do, however, is this, he may distinguish between the right to live and the right to become a parent. And this is the simple solution which both Huxley and Darwin missed. In this simple solution the antinomy which both Huxley and Darwin saw between cosmic and moral evolution disappears.....

"Passing to the third division of eugenics, it seems that whilst we try to encourage parenthood on the part of the worthy, and to discourage it on the part of the unworthy, we must be prepared

also to oppose the degradation of healthy stocks through contact with, or as a result of racial poisons.

"Of these poisonous agencies, there are some which we are certain of; how many there may be that are yet unknown, remains to be proved. Alcohol, lead, arsenic, phosphorus, and one or two diseases are decidedly transmissible to the future, commonly by direct transference from parent to offspring. These are the poisons which eugenists must fight against, and they are false to their creed and to their great mission, if they fail to do all they can to root them out. The chief, most urgent, most important task seems to be to interfere with maternal alcoholism."

In concluding this announcement we wish to reproduce M. Deshumbert's concluding chapter "On Death," which he says is to some extent taken from an article by H. de Parville and which may be compared with similar sentiments which have appeared in publications of the Open Court Publishing Company.[1]

"You think of the pain that you will feel, as you imagine at the moment of death, and you are afraid.

"Remember that death is very rarely a painful trial.

"Your end will almost surely be preceded by a comfortable feeling, or at least by a cessation of pain. Indeed, as your blood will no longer rid itself of the carbonic acid, the latter will accumulate, benumb all suffering in you, and put your body to sleep, just as any other anæsthetic would do. Pain having ceased you will perhaps have the illusion that your recovery is near, and you will make plans for the future. And then you will fall asleep in peace. If, however, you had no illusions, and kept your lucidity, you would see death approach without terror, and without uneasiness: you would not fear it, you would calmly await it, and that without any effort on your part, and as a natural thing. It is nature who wishes it. Indeed, the fear of death which nature has put into us, disappears at the moment when all hope of recovery must be given up. We are afraid of dying as long as there is a possibility of avoiding death, and as long as our efforts towards that object might succeed; but as soon as that possibility ceases, fear also ceases.

"This fear of death, when the end is still far away, proves nature's foresight. If we were not afraid of death, we might seek it at the slightest annoyance, or at least we should make no effort to avoid it, and nature wants, on the contrary, that life should be con-

[1] See "The Beauty of Death" by Woods Hutchinson, *Open Court,* IX, p. 4639, republished in his *Gospel According to Darwin.* See also Carus, "The Conquest of Death," in the *Homilies of Science,* p. 155, and the chapters immediately following.

tinued. As nature only produces the minimum of pain, our terror ceases as soon as the struggle becomes useless, and at that moment the wish to live disappears also. Therefore, death is only feared during the fulness of life; but the nearer death comes to us, the less it frightens us.

"William Hunter said a short time before he died: 'If I had the strength to hold a pen, I should like to use it to express how easy and pleasant it is to die.'

"But, you say, 'All men do not die of disease, many are killed by accidents.' A violent death is much less painful than you think, one might even say not painful at all. Here are some examples: Let us question Livingstone about his encounter with a lion, which mauled his shoulder. He said: 'I was on a little hillock; the lion leapt on to my shoulder, and we fell together to the ground. The shock produced a stupor similar to that which a mouse feels after the first shake by the cat. It was a sort of dreamy condition, in which there was neither sensation of pain, nor feeling of terror, although I was absolutely conscious of all that was taking place. Fear did not exist for me, and I could look at the animal without horror. This particular state is probably produced in all animals killed by carnivora.'

"The Alpinist Whymper, in speaking of his fall of 220 feet from the Mont Cervin, when he rebounded from one glacier, and from one ragged rock to another, wrote: 'I was perfectly conscious of what was happening to me, and I counted every bump: but like a chloroformed patient, I felt no pain. Naturally every bump was more violent than the preceding one, and I remember thinking very distinctly, that if the next was more violent, it would mean the end. What is even more remarkable is, that my bounds through space were not at all disagreeable; however, if the distance had been a little more considerable, I believe I should completely have lost consciousness; therefore I am convinced that death, when caused by a fall from a considerable height, is one of the least painful which one can undergo."

"Admiral Beaufort, who in his youth fell into the water, says: 'From the moment when I gave up all efforts, a feeling of calm and almost perfect tranquility took the place of tumultuous sensations: it was apathy, not resignation, because it seemed to me that to be drowned was not a bad thing. I no longer thought of being saved, and I did not suffer in any way. On the contrary, my sensations were rather agreeable, recalling the feeling of benumbed contentment which precedes sleep, when caused by physical fatigue.'

"Therefore, as Livingstone said, there is a benevolent mechanism which in a case of accident performs the same function as carbonic acid does in a case of death by illness.

"One may suffer during the illness which precedes death, but one does not suffer at the moment of death.

"Death in itself is absolutely free from pain, just like sleep."